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Politeness in eighteenth-century drama: a discursive approach

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Abstract: Fictional texts constitute complex communicative acts between an author and an audience, and they regularly depict interactions between characters. Both levels are susceptible to an analysis of politeness. This is particularly true for early eighteenth-century drama, which – in the context of the age of politeness – established new dramatic genres to educate and edify their audiences. Characters were used to demonstrate good or bad behaviour as examples to be followed or avoided. Early eighteenth-century drama was a reaction against what was considered to be the immorality and profanity of Restoration drama of the seventeenth century. Two plays serve as illustrations and a testing ground for an analysis of fictional politeness that considers both communicative levels; the play itself and the interactions within the play. Richard Steele's sentimental comedy "The Conscious Lovers" (1722) gives an example of good behaviour by being exceedingly polite to the audience in the theatre through characters that are exceedingly polite to each other; and George Lillo's domestic tragedy "The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell" (1731) shows the "private woe" of everyday characters in order to warn the younger generation against wrongdoing and to propagate middle-class virtues and moral values.

Keywords: literature, plays, sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy, Richard Steele, George Lillo

1 Introduction

Literary texts are very complex communicative acts and as such they can be investigated from many different angles. On a very immediate level they constitute a communicative act between a (real) author and the actual readers of his or her text, even if the act of writing and the act of reading may lie centuries

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apart and even if the author cannot possibly have had any clear idea of who would read his or her text in the centuries to come. Roger Sell in a series of publications has focused on this level in his investigation of the politeness (not *in* but) *of* literary texts (e.g., Sell 1991, 2000, 2001).

Fictional texts depict communicative interactions between fictional characters, and, in fact, it is this level of fictional interactions which has received most attention from politeness scholars. This is true not only for Brown and Gilman (1989)'s early application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) conception of positive and negative politeness strategies. It is also true for subsequent scholars who extended the investigations to other theoretical politeness frameworks, to aspects of impoliteness and to other fictional genres, including even film (e.g., Culpeper 1996, 1998).

In the following, I want to show how a discursive politeness analysis of plays can pay attention both to the communicative act between the author and the audience (readers or theatregoers) and the communicative acts between the characters depicted in the plays. My examples are two plays written and first performed in the early eighteenth century, the age of politeness, in which politeness was an ideology of the upper classes and a means of controlling access to social advancement (Watts 1999, 2002). They are Richard Steele's sentimental comedy "The Conscious Lovers", first performed in London in 1722 and George Lillo's domestic tragedy "The London Merchant, or The History of George Barnwell" first performed in London in 1731. Both plays were written with the explicit aim of not only entertaining but, more importantly, educating the audience. Richard Steele wrote his sentimental comedy in reaction to Restoration drama in order to give an example of good behaviour. It is a play that tries to be exceedingly polite to the audience in the theatre by presenting characters that are exceedingly polite to each other. George Lillo wrote his melodramatic and rigidly moral domestic tragedy as a warning to the younger generation against wrongdoing.

2 Politeness in fiction

2.1 Politeness of literary texts

Literary texts can be seen as communicative acts between real authors and real readers even if the text is read by readers who live centuries after the author and even if the author could not possibly have had a clear image of his or her potential audience or even of the fact that his or her texts would still be read long after his or her death (see Sell 1991, 2000, 2001).

> Literary writing and reading are viewed as uses of language which amount to interpersonal activity, and which are thereby capable of bringing about a change in the status quo. This means that my references to communicative pragmatics will carry a strong echo of the Greek root *pragma* (= "deed"). (Sell 2000: 2)

Thus, Sell envisages a triangular situation in which a writer and a reader are engaged in communication about some third entity, and, therefore, literature can be analyzed from the perspective of a general theory of communication, which makes it possible, for instance, to talk about the politeness of Chaucer to his readers.

Sell (1985: 499) invokes Gérard Genette's (1980) distinction between the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic level of literary texts, where the extradiegetic level concerns the relationship between the actual author of the text and his or her audience, while the intradiegetic level concerns the events inside the story. There are often several intradiegetic levels with fictional narrators and narratees and embedded stories. Sell illustrates these levels and the concepts of tellability and politeness with Geoffrey Chaucer's Miller's Tale, one of the tales in the *Canterbury Tales*. The (intradiegetic) I-narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* relates the story of pilgrim narrators who take part in a story telling competition and tell a diverse range of stories. The miller tells a fabliau of a reeve, his beautiful young wife Alison and their lodger Nicholas. In order to apply the notion of politeness, Sell (1985: 504) distinguishes between selectional politeness and presentational politeness. Selectional politeness concerns the avoidance of taboos and the observance of social and moral decorum. Presentational politeness concerns the strict observance of Grice's Cooperative Principle. But Sell is quick to point out that authors do not strive for absolute politeness, but for the right level of politeness. "Too much selectional politeness makes for obsequiousness, too much presentational politeness is merely dull" (Sell 1985: 505).

In this respect, Chaucer's Miller's Tale takes huge risks on the extradiegetical level. There are severe infringements of social decorum on several levels. The story takes great relish in Alison's and Nicholas' adulterous adventures, in Nicholas' blasphemous abuse of the story of Noah's flood, and the scatological farce of the misplaced kiss. The miller does not hesitate to use sexually explicit vocabulary, such as *swyved* 'copulate with', *ers* 'buttocks' and *queynte* 'pudendum'. "The miller's story, then, is a deliberate challenge to socially accepted standards of decorum" (Sell 1985: 507), but literary conventions and in particular literary genres, such as fabliaux, allow or even encourage such challenges. And often such instances of selectional impoliteness may be hedged by the introduction of additional intradiegetical levels. The I-narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* protests that he must relate the stories exactly as they were told and

thus shifts the blame to the level of the pilgrim narrator, the miller. Sell also points out several violations of presentational politeness in the form of seemingly incoherent or abrupt developments in the story line, which he analyses as violations of Grice's Cooperative Principle and as such as infringements of presentational politeness.

2.2 Politeness in literary texts

The majority of politeness work on literary sources, however, does not investigate the politeness *of* the literary text itself, but focuses on the behaviour of the characters depicted *within* the literary sources. In Brown and Gilman's (1989) early adaptation of Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) politeness theory, the focus was very much on the politeness between different characters in Shakespeare's tragedies *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*. They were particularly interested in Brown and Levinson's formula for assessing the weightiness of a face-threatening act, which consists of the three dimensions power (P), distance (D) and the ranked extremity (R) of this particular face-threatening act in a given society. They search these plays for pairs of speeches that differ on only one of these three dimensions but are identical on the other two. Both speeches in each dyad are then evaluated as to the amount of politeness work that is carried out by the speaker to offset relevant face-threatening acts. In order to measure the amount of politeness work, they calculate the number of positive and negative politeness strategies, whose classification they adapted from the classification proposed by Brown and Levinson. Extracts (1) and (2) illustrate positive politeness strategies, which make the addressees feel appreciated and thus enhance their positive face, while extracts (3) and (4) illustrate negative strategies, which indicate the speaker's non-imposition and thus enhance the addressee's negative face (all examples quoted after Brown and Gilman 1989: 167–8).

(1) Use in-group identity markers in speech.
Hamlet (to Horatio): Sir, my good friend, I'll change that name with you (I, *ii*, 163)

(2) Give something desired: gifts, position, sympathy, understanding.
Goneril (to Edmund): Decline your head. This kiss, if it durst speak,
Would stretch thy spirits up into the air. (*King Lear*, IV, ii, 22–23)

(3) Do not assume willingness to comply. Question, hedge.
Queen (to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern): If it will please you
To show us so much gentry [courtesy] and good will. (*Hamlet*, II, ii, 21–22)

(4) Give deference.
Othello (to the Duke and Venetian Senators): Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approved good masters. (I, iii, 76–77)

On this basis, Brown and Gilman should, in principle, be able to score each speech for politeness and thus to empirically test Brown and Levinson's theory. If speaker A has power over speaker B, A should need fewer politeness strategies to carry out a particular face-threatening act than speaker B uses for a similar face-threatening act against A. If A and B are socially distant, they should both use more politeness strategies than a similar pair which is less distant. And the speaker should use more politeness strategies for a more serious face-threatening act than for a less serious act. The results of their investigation are those predicted by the theory for two of the three dimensions. The results for the dimensions power and ranking of imposition support the theory but the results for the dimension social distance does not.

Kopytko (1993, 1995) set out to replicate and extend Brown and Gilman's study. He added four comedies (*The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*) to Brown and Gilman's list of four tragedies mentioned above. In contrast to them, he tried to quantify the precise number of positive and negative politeness strategies. On the basis of his counts he concludes that in all plays positive politeness strategies outnumber negative ones but the balance in favour of positive strategies is clearly more marked in the tragedies. The approaches by Brown and Gilman and by Kopytko provide insights into the strategic use of specific formulations that are assigned more or less fixed politeness values. More recent research has found this point of view to be too narrow.

Culpeper (1996), for instance, tries to adapt Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach to account for impoliteness strategies in literary texts. He develops impoliteness strategies and correlates them with plot development that often moves from a situation of equilibrium through a situation of disequilibrium back to a situation of equilibrium. Impoliteness may be an important aspect in moving the plot from one situation to the next, as he demonstrates on the basis of the central banquet scene of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (act 3, scene 4). At the beginning of the scene, Culpeper (1996: 364) argues, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth go out of their way to be polite to the assembled Lords and thus re-establish and maintain a situation of equilibrium which is violently threatened by the appearance of the ghost. In this situation, Lady Macbeth uses impoliteness towards her husband to goad his manliness and push him into action. She asks him: "Are you a man?" and thus flouts Grice's maxim of quality with the

implicature that he lacks certain typical manly characteristics. She uses sarcasm and ridicules his fears:

(5) O, these flaws and starts –
Impostors to true fear – would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authoris'd by her grandam. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool.
(*Macbeth* 3.4.62–67; quoted after Culpeper 1996: 365)

In a further article, Culpeper (1998) applies his framework of politeness and impoliteness to another type of fictional text, to a film dialogue. As an example he analyses the interaction between the main characters, Charlie and the Colonel, in the film *Scent of a Woman* (1992), directed by Martin Brest. Here, too, an analysis in terms of positive and negative politeness and impoliteness strategies reveals interesting insights not only into the characters and their developing relationship but also to plot development. It turns out that it is at a crucial point in the unfolding story that Charlie's character, who has been conventionally polite throughout up to this point, changes dramatically. The blind Colonel, who has employed Charlie as a carer, tries to shoot himself. Charlie's polite request to hand over the gun ("Colonel, why don't you give me the gun ... alright?") has turned out to be ineffective. And at this point Charlie attacks the Colonel with severe impoliteness ("you miserable blind motherfucker") (Culpeper 1998: 92). This scene contrasts with the opening scene, also analyzed by Culpeper, in which the Colonel's extreme impoliteness contrasts with Charlie's extreme politeness, and thus Culpeper (1998: 93) can show how "(im)politeness is crucial to the construction of character".

2.3 Discursive politeness approaches

For the last fifteen years or so, politeness theory has moved away from the seminal Brown and Levinson (1987) model, which has come under increasingly severe criticism (see in particular Eelen 2001; Watts 2003; Locher and Watts 2005; and for an overview Mills 2011). The main point of criticism is generally that Brown and Levinson's model assigns specific politeness values to individual linguistic expressions. More recent approaches, on the other hand, argue that politeness values are not static. Specific linguistic expressions do not have fixed politeness values. Such values are always discursively negotiated. This

can be understood in two different ways. First, it has become standard to distinguish between politeness$_1$ and politeness$_2$, where politeness$_1$ refers to the folk notion of politeness, i.e., the everyday word "politeness" used by people to talk about issues of politeness; and politeness$_2$ refers to politeness as a technical term used by politeness scholars with specific definitions that may deviate more or less from the less clearly defined everyday notion. According to some scholars (e.g., Watts 2003), politeness research should be based more or less exclusively on politeness$_1$. For others, this is only one part of the story, which should be supplemented by precise definitions of politeness$_2$.

Locher and Watts (2005: 16) describe the task of the discursive politeness analyst as follows:

> We consider it important to take native speaker assessments of politeness seriously and to make them the basis of a discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness. The discursive dispute over such terms in instances of social practice should represent the locus of attention for politeness research. By discursive dispute we do not mean real instances of disagreement amongst members of a community of practice over the terms "polite", "impolite", etc. but rather the discursive structuring and reproduction of forms of behavior and their potential assessments (...) by individual participants. (Locher and Watts 2005: 16)

In literary contexts, too, passages can be found in which politeness issues are discussed explicitly, as for instance in Shakespeare's *King Henry VI*, *Part 3*, in which King Henry reflects on the semantic values of address terms (see Busse 2006: 210).

(6) Richard: Good day, my lord. What, at your book so hard?
King Henry: Ay, my good lord – my lord, I should say rather.
'Tis sin to flatter; 'good' was little better:
'Good Gloucester' and 'good devil' were alike,
And both preposterous; therefore not 'good lord.'
(3H6 5.6.1–5, King Henry VI, Part 3; quoted after Busse 2006: 210)

King Henry has been captured by Richard and his followers. In this exchange that takes place in the tower the king uses the conventional term of address, "my good lord", but then corrects himself and leaves out the adjective *good* which, according to him, does not apply to Richard. Thus, King Henry negotiates the value of the address term between the conventional form and the residual semantic meanings of its constituent parts.

In a recent paper (Jucker 2012) I have tried to apply a discursive politeness approach to historical material. As an example I have analyzed Ben Jonson's

play *Volpone, or the Fox* (first performed in London in 1605), which is a play full of deception and intrigue. Volpone, a rich Venetian gentleman, tries to dupe greedy fortune hunters by pretending to be on his deathbed and willing to bequeath his fortune to whoever shows himself most worthy of it. In this situation the characters' surface politeness is often in direct conflict with their real motives and intentions. A politeness analysis cannot rely on the conventional politeness values of linguistic expressions, such as deferential terms of address, indirectness or compliments. They have to be seen in the context of the speaker intentions to which the reader or theatregoer (but not the interacting characters) has access via soliloquies and scenes with other characters.

3 Eighteenth-century English drama

The early eighteenth century was the dawn of the age of politeness and as such it was closely linked to the growing commercial middle class:

> In a sense politeness was a logical consequence of commerce. A feudal society and an agrarian economy were associated with an elaborate code of honour designed to govern relations among the privileged few. Their inferiors could safely be left to languish in brutish ignorance under brutal laws. But a society in which the most vigorous and growing element was a commercial middle class, involved both in production and consumption, required a more sophisticated means of regulating manners. Politeness conveyed upper-class gentility, enlightenment, and sociability to a much wider élite whose only qualification was money, but who were glad to spend it on acquiring the status of gentleman. (Langford 1989: 4)

It was the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, which brought improvements in agricultural methods, new roads and canals. This in turn led to new prosperity and a rapidly growing middle class, and in this context, rules of conduct replaced the old class distinctions. Politeness became an ideology that was used by the higher social classes to distinguish themselves from the lower social classes (Watts 1999, 2002; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2010), and in a context of upward social mobility it was important for each individual to know exactly how to behave in accordance with his or her position in society. This led to increased prescriptivism with countless new grammar books and dictionaries (Locher 2008) but it also led to a new understanding of the function of the theatre.

At the very end of the seventeenth century, Jeremy Collier (1650–1726) published a pamphlet entitled "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage", in which he attacked the profanity and moral degeneration

in the stage productions of Restoration comedy, which in themselves had been a reaction against the Puritan ban of the theatre (Nünning and Nünning 1998: 90). It is in this context that new dramatic genres emerged, and two particularly prominent genres were the sentimental comedy and the domestic tragedy, with their most prominent representatives, Richard Steele's "The Conscious Lovers" and George Lillo's "The London Merchant, or The Story of George Barnwell", respectively.

3.1 Richard Steele's "The Conscious Lovers"

Richard Steele's play "The Conscious Lovers" was first performed in 1722. It is a representative of the genre of sentimental comedy (see Novak 1979; Hynes 2004). Steele wanted to set an example of a comedy that did not rely on lewd jokes and on dubious characters. On the contrary he wanted to show exemplary characters as examples to follow, and in the introduction to the play he states his aim to improve drama: "and sure it must be an Improvement of it, to introduce a Joy too exquisite for Laughter" (Steele [1993]: 68). Hynes (2004) has argued that although the play is not what might be called a "living classic", it is important because of its innovations and because of its departures from the traditional comic forms of the day. Steele introduced a new kind of virtuous hero and characters who were too good for the traditional comedy of the day. This new type of play avoids satire and emphasizes good characters as models of behaviour (Hynes 2004: 148). In fact, in "The Conscious Lovers" Mr Sealand, a rich merchant, says to Sir John Bevil: "We merchants are a species of gentry, that have grown into the world this last century, and are as honourable, and almost as useful, as you landed folks, that have always thought your selves so much above us" (Act 4, Scene 2, p. 124).

Richard Steele (1672–1729) was the co-founder together with Joseph Addison of *The Spectator*. He was a Member of Parliament and a strong supporter of the Hanoverian succession and of George I. As a result of this support he was knighted and became manager of the Drury Lane Theatre in London. It was there that he wrote and staged "The Conscious Lovers", and in his dedication to the King, Steele thanks him for the appointment.

In the play, Sir John Bevil wants his son to marry Lucinda, the daughter of a rich merchant, Mr. Sealand. But Bevil Jr. is in love with the orphan Indiana, and he faces the dilemma that he cannot marry her without disobeying the wishes of his father. So, he initially pretends to be willing to marry Lucinda, which in turn confuses and enrages his friend Myrtle, who is in love with Lucinda. To complicate matters, Mrs Sealand has different plans for her daughter

Lucinda and wants to marry her to Cimberton, a coxcomb; and Bevil Jr.'s manservant, Tom, is in love with Lucinda's maid Phillis. The core scene of the play takes place in the fourth act, when Myrtle challenges his friend Bevis Jr. to a duel. Bevil Jr. refuses but Myrtle's insults bring him to almost accepting the challenge, before finally refusing and maintaining the civility:

> The movement of this scene is most significant. It was not enough for Steele simply to assert his hero's rejection of dueling, for a straightforward refusal to fight could always be attributed to cowardice. The "patience of a man" must, on the contrary, be a manly patience, a principled calm backed up by a fully masculine power of action. In this sense it was essential for Steele to show Bevil's vacillations in the face of Myrtle's challenge. To be a virtuous man he must be peaceable, but not tame; not violent, but firm. (Hynes 2004: 150)

In the sense of Sell (1991), Steele wants to maintain a high level of politeness both on the extradiegetic and on the intradiegetic level. He is extremely polite to his audience in the theatre by presenting characters that are extremely polite to each other. In contrast to Chaucer he does not infringe the social decorum of selectional politeness and presentational politeness for some literary effects. The extradiegetic level between him and his audience is of central importance. He wants to educate by presenting exemplary characters to his audience. The play is used to advance a social and cultural ideal, "even the back-chat among the servants is governed by notions of loyalty and propriety" (Lindsay 1993: xxiv). Ozoux (2002: 160) describes the politeness of the play with the term "gentility": "C'est par le biais de cette nouvelle méthode que Steele revient sur le concept de 'gentility', en offrant au spectateur l'image d'un gentleman exemplaire" (Ozoux 2002: 160).

In extract (7), Humphrey, an old servant to Sir John Bevil, is given the task of sounding out Bevil Jr.'s true feelings for his intended bride, Lucinda, by approaching Tom, Bevil Jr.'s manservant. The ensuing conversation between the two servants is full of explicit talk about proper behaviour. It is also fashioned as a contrast between the old world and the new world.

(7) Humphrey: (...) Oh, here's the prince of poor coxcombs, the representative of all the better fed than taught. – Ho! ho! Tom, whither so gay and so airy this morning?
Enter Tom, singing.

Tom: Sir, we servants of single gentlemen are another kind of people than you domestick ordinary drudges that do business: we are rais'd above you: The pleasures of board-wages, tavern-dinners, and many a clear gain; vails, alas! You never heard or dreamt of.

Humphrey: Thou hast follies and vices enough for a man of ten thousand a year, tho' 'tis but as t'other day that I sent for you to town, to put you into Mr Sealand's family, that you might learn a little before I put you to my young master, who is too gentle for such a rude thing as you were into proper obedience (...)

Tom: (...) You talk as if the world was now, just as it was when my old master and you were in your youth – when you went to dinner because it was so much a clock, when the great blow was given in the hall at the pantrey-door, and all the family came out of their holes in such strange dresses and formal faces as you see in the pictures in our long gallery in the country.

Humphrey: Why, you wild rogue!

Tom: You could not fall to your dinner till a formal fellow in a black gown said something over the meat, as if the cook had not make it ready enough.

Humphrey: Sirrah, who do you prate after? – Despising men of sacred characters! I hope you never heard my good young master talk so like a profligate.

(...)

Humphrey: I hope the fashion of being lewd and extravagant, despising of decency and order, is almost at an end, since it is arrived at persons of your quality.

(Act 1, Scene 1, p. 78–79)

The two servants here discuss the nature of proper behaviour. Tom believes that he has a much better life because he does not have to follow the old-fashioned formalities of earlier times, when Humphrey and Sir John Bevil were still young. Humphrey, on the other hand deplores the lack of good manners and decency. He compares Tom's behaviour to those of a rich person "Thou hast follies and vices enough for a man of ten thousand a year" and then expresses his hope that such bad manners are no longer fashionable because they have already percolated down the social ladder to the likes of Tom. For Humphrey, good manners are a sign of a good character. He considers Tom's tirade against the formalities surrounding dinners to be an attack against the good character of the people who observe these formalities. Bevil Jr., the young master, according to him has a gentle disposition which would not be able to cope with Tom's rude behaviour. It was necessary to educate Tom first before he could be brought into contact with Bevil Jr. Thus, we learn a lot about the importance of proper behaviour, which in this passage mainly concerns non-

verbal aspects, such as the way of being called to dinner, the formal dresses, the facial expressions, and grace being spoken at the beginning of the meal.

In extract (8), the main character of the play, Bevil Jr. visits the orphan Indiana, the woman he loves. The topic of their conversation also focuses on the proper behaviour.

(8) *Enter Bevil junior*

Bevil Junior: Madam, your most obedient – I am afraid I broke in upon your rest last night – d'twas very late before we parted; but d'twas your own fault: I never saw you in such agreeable humour.

Indiana: I am extremely glad we were both pleas'd; so I thought I never saw you better company.

Bevil Junior: Me, Madam! You rally; I said very little.

Indiana: But, I am afraid, you heard me say a great deal; and when a woman is in the talking vein, the most agreeable thing a man can do, you know, is to have patience, to hear her.

Bevil Junior: Then it's pity, Madam, you should ever be silent, that we might be always agreeable to one another.

Indiana: If I had your talent, or power, to make my actions speak for me, I might indeed be silent, and yet pretend to something more than the agreeable.

Bevil Junior: If I might be vain of any thing, in my power, Madam, d'tis that my understanding, from all your sex, has mark'd you out, as the most deserving object of my esteem.

Indiana: Should I think I deserve this, d'twere enough to make my vanity forfeit the very esteem you offer me.

(Act 2, Scene 2, p. 99)

Bevil Jr. apologizes for having stayed too long on his previous visit the night before and Indiana compliments him for having been such an attentive interlocutor. They flatter each other and artfully refuse the praise they receive because accepting it would show a lack of modesty. It is part of the good manners to be a good listener. Bevil Jr., therefore, suggests that Indiana should talk all the time to give him the chance to be a good listener, which would be agreeable to both of them, and Indiana immediately returns the compliment by suggesting that he doesn't even need words. He can make his actions speak for him and make him agreeable. He then singles her out as "the most deserving object of my esteem", to which she replies by explicitly stating the dilemma of the

compliment. If she accepts the compliment, she no longer deserves it, because it would be a sign of vanity and reduce the esteem that she deserves.

In extract (9), Mr Sealand, the father of Lucinda, talks to a servant who opens the door when he wants to talk to Indiana. He wants to find out whether her relationship to Bevil Jr. might be a threat to his own plans of a marriage between his daughter and Bevil Jr.

(9) Mr Sealand: I think this is the door – (*Knocks.*) I'll carry this matter with an air of authority, to enquire, tho' I make an errand, to begin discourse. (*Knocks again, and enter a Foot-Boy.*) So, young man! is your lady within?
Boy: Alack, Sir! I am but a country boy – I dant know whether she is, or noa: but an you'll stay a bit, I'll goa, and ask the gentlewoman that's with her.
Mr Sealand: Why, Sirrah, tho' you are a country boy, you can see, can't you? you know whether she is it at home when you see her, don't you?
Boy: Nay, nay, I'm not such a country lad neither, Master, to think she's at home, because I see her: I have been in town but a month, and I lost one place already, for believing my own eyes.
Mr Sealand: Why, Sirrah! Have you learnt to lie already?
Boy: Ah! Master! Things that are lies in the country, are not lies at London – I begin to know my business a little better than so – but an you please to walk in, I'll call a gentlewoman to you, that can tell you for certain – she can make bold to ask my lady her self.
Mr Sealand: O! then, she is within, I find, tho' you dare not say so.
Boy: Nay, nay! That neither her, nor there: what's matter, whether she is within or no, if she has not a mind to see any body?
(Act 5, Scene 2, p. 134)

In this amusing little interaction Mr Sealand wants to find out whether Indiana is at home or not but the servant does not want to give a clear answer to what seems to be a simple question. In fact, he spells out the dilemma in his last turn in this interaction. It does not matter whether she is actually at home or not, but only whether she wants to receive visitors or not.

In the end, Mr Sealand finds out that Indiana is his long lost first daughter, and everything turns out well. Bevil Jr. can marry Indiana, Lucinda marries Myrtle, and Cimberton is no longer interested since the dowry has now been

halved. Thus, all the main characters stay true to their noble and virtuous self. And even though some dressing up had been necessary to bring about the happy end (Myrtle and Tom disguised as lawyers to delay the unwanted marriage procedures), the play is remarkably free of deception and intrigue. The play, it seems, is exceedingly polite on all levels. It is only the servant Tom, and to some extent the unwanted lover Cimberton, who deviate a little from the perfect ideal of a perfectly polite character.

3.2 George Lillo's "The London Merchant"

George Lillo (1691–1739) was an English playwright and tragedian and the author of several plays including "The London Merchant, or The History of George Barnwell", which was first performed in London in 1731. It is an important play because it created a new genre, the domestic tragedy, in which everyday, non-aristocratic people interact in a contemporary British context, mostly in intimate private settings. The focus is on the subjective experiences, sufferings and sentiments of the protagonists, and the play as a whole aims to propagate middle-class virtues and moral values (Nünning and Nünning 1998: 99). Neumann (2011: 160–161) even argues that the genre is defined by its didactic intention. There is a direct link between the standards of judgments applied to the characters of the play and the standards of the real world (see also Wallace 1992: 129). The intention is to create a sympathetic and emotional response in the audience.

In the dedication to his patron, Sir John Eyles, a Member of Parliament and Alderman of the City of London, Lillo argues that princes are not alone in suffering misfortunes, and, therefore, tragedy should not confine its characters to princes:

> Plays founded on moral tales in private life may be of admirable use, by carrying conviction to the mind with such irresistible force as to engage all the faculties and powers of the soul in the cause of virtue, by stifling vice in its first principles. They who imagine this to be too much to be attributed to tragedy, must be strangers to the energy of that noble species of poetry. (Lillo [1993]: 262)

In the prologue, spoken by the actor, who plays George Barnwell, the play to be performed is called a "tale of private woe", and it is set in contrast to the tragic muse which "delights to show Princes distressed, and scenes of royal woe" (Prologue, p. 265). The play is a "moral tale":

Which, for a century of rolling years,
Has filled a thousand, thousand eyes with tears.
If thoughtless youth to warn, and shame the age
From vice destructive, well becomes the stage; (Lillo 1993: 262)

In the play, the apprentice George Barnwell is seduced by Sarah Millwood, a London prostitute, but he immediately feels guilty for having disobeyed his master, Thorowgood, a London merchant. He is prompted by Millwood to steal a large sum of money from his master, and later she even convinces him to murder and rob his rich uncle. After the murder George returns to Millwood with bloody hands but without the money. George and Millwood are arrested. In his prison cell, George is visited by Thorowgood, by Trueman, his fellow apprentice, and by Maria, Thorowgood's daughter, who all forgive him. George is truly repentant and awaits his execution.

The double title of this play refers to the two male protagonists of the play. The first part refers to the exemplary London merchant and the second to George Barnwell, his apprentice, who can be interpreted as a fatal deviation from the ideal of a good merchant (Neumann 2011: 165). In extract (10), which is taken from the very first scene of the play, Thorowgood, the London merchant, talks to Trueman, Barnwell's fellow apprentice, and instructs him about the true nature of an honest merchant. Merchants are stylized as pillars of society. They contribute both to its safety and happiness, which gives them a dignity and honor that comes with the highest expectation of virtuous behaviour. Trueman wholeheartedly embraces these ideals and condemns the mere thought of a deviation from the path of virtue and with these words already condemns the actions of his fellow apprentice that will unfold in the further course of the play.

(10) Trueman: He must be insensible indeed, who is not affected when the safety of his country is concerned. Sir, may I know by what means? If I am too bold –

Thorowgood: Your curiosity is laudable; and I gratify it with the greater pleasure, because from thence you may learn how honest merchants, as such, may sometimes contribute to the safety of their country, as they do at all times to its happiness; that if hereafter you should be tempted to any action that has the appearance of vice or meanness in it, upon reflecting on the dignity of our profession, you may, with honest scorn, reject whatever is unworthy of it.

Trueman: Should Barnwell, or I, who have the benefit of your example, by our ill-conduct bring any imputation on that honourable name, we must be left without excuse.
(Act 1, Scene 1, p. 269)

In the context of the eighteenth-century rising middle class, the ideology of politeness and educational theatre, this must have been meant as an instruction to the theatre audience as well. The values that Thorowgood and Trueman ascribe to the exemplary merchant are communicated both on the intradiegetic and on the extradiegetic level.

In the second scene of the play, the merchant talks to his daughter, Maria, and continues the theme of the good merchant. He instructs her to prepare a feast for guests that he wants to entertain. No costs are to be spared to provide the best possible food and entertainment.

(11) Thorowgood: Well, Maria, have you given orders for the entertainment? I would have it in some measure worthy the guests. Let there be plenty, and of the best, that the courtiers, though they should deny us citizens politeness, may at least commend our hospitality.
Maria: Sir, I have endeavoured not to wrong your well-known generosity by an ill-timed parsimony.
(Act 1, Scene 2, p. 270–271)

Thorowgood sets up a contrast between his courtier guests, members of the aristocracy, and the middle class he belongs to as a merchant. The notion "politeness" is clearly used as an ideology by the aristocracy to distinguish themselves from the lower social classes (Watts 1999, 2002). Thorowgood appears to accept the class division but he aspires to a way of behaviour that is as close as possible to the polite behaviour of the higher social classes. The term "hospitality" seems to capture much of what would be "polite" except for the ideological overtones of the upper classes. The term "citizen" was loaded in the eighteenth century (Laura Wright, personal communication). In the same way that "polite" could be used by the upper classes as an attribute of inclusion into their own ranks, the term "citizen" was used to keep the middle class out.

In the middle of the play, Trueman and Mary explicitly discuss good and appropriate behavior. George Barnwell has stolen a considerable amount of money from his master, and he has failed to return back home. Trueman and Mary are convinced that there must be a plausible reason for this behavior and want to cover for him in front of Thorowgood. Mary proposes to replace the

stolen money from her own funds and Trueman wants to invent a reason for Barnwell's absence.

(12) Trueman: Trust to my diligence for that. In the meantime, I'll conceal his absence from your father, or find such excuses for it that the real cause shall never be suspected.
Maria: In attempting to save from shame one whom we hope may yet return to virtue, to Heaven and you, the judges of this action, I appeal, whether I have done anything misbecoming my sex and character.
Trueman: Earth must approve the deed, and Heaven, I doubt not, will reward it.
Maria: If Heaven succeed it, I am well rewarded. A virgin's fame is sullied by suspicion's lightest breath; and therefore, as this must be a secret from my father and the world for Barnwell's sake, for mine, let it be so to him.
(Act 3, Scene 3, p. 295)

Maria is concerned whether her action of covering up for Barnwell's theft is appropriate for her social position. Her reputation must remain pure. They agree that her actions will be judged by heaven. What they plan to do must be right because they do it in the interest of Barnwell. They still believe in his moral integrity in spite of the facts, or at least in the possibility for Barnwell to return to the path of virtue. Once again, the moral values that are discussed between the characters are projected beyond the intradigetic level. They are directly relevant for the theatre audience, who is expected to learn from the examples on the stage.

The heavy morality of this play, however, makes it difficult for a modern audience. Collins' (1957: 156) comment is probably still typical of current opinions when he compares Restoration drama with what came afterwards. "Restoration drama sparkles by comparison with the virtual nullity which followed it" and again: "the plays which followed [after Restoration drama], though informed by higher moral intentions, were dull, un-lifelike, fundamentally insincere (Steele's are the typical example)" (Collins 1957: 171). It seems that excessively polite drama does not make for good entertainment. Culpeper (1996: 364) argues that "there are good reasons why drama in general thrives on verbal conflict. Impolite behaviour, either as a result of social disharmony or as the cause of it, does much to further the development of character and plot.".

4 Conclusion

Fictional texts are seen as complex communicative acts. On the one hand, they constitute communicative acts between an author and his or her reader, who might read a text many years and even centuries after it was written. And, on the other hand, they depict communicative acts between characters of their narratives. It is important to note that such an analysis does not use literature as an imperfect approximation to "real" interaction, whether it focuses on the politeness *of* the literary text or on the politeness *in* the literary text. It takes the various communicative levels of literature in their own right, with their own limitations and conditions.

In early eighteenth-century drama, as shown in Steele's "The Conscious Lovers" and Lillo's "The London Merchant", the two levels cannot really be distinguished. The characters are polite and virtuous in the play as an example and for the edification of the audience. Even Barnwell appears as a "tragic middle-class hero who commits a fatal error *and* represents virtue" (Neumann 2011: 167, italics original). In the end he repents and takes full responsibility for his actions, and he accepts his punishment, the death-sentence. The educational intent of both plays is spelled out explicitly by their authors in a dedication, preface or prologue, and it must be seen in the context of the rising middle classes, who had a desire to learn proper, and in particular polite, behaviour and who needed advice from grammar books, etiquette books and plays.

As I have tried to show, literary texts provide some very specific advantages and disadvantages for such analyses. In fictional texts it is often possible to contrast the outward behaviour of individual characters with their true intentions. In this respect, readers or theatregoers have a privileged position. Thus fictional texts provide one excellent source of data for politeness theorists, and in return, the analysis of politeness and impoliteness in specific fictional texts may provide new insights for the literary scholar.

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Bionote

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